27 August 2002
English
Original: Arabic

Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2002

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Ms. Radhia **Achouri** (Tunisia)

I. Calendar of conferences and meetings

A. Matters related to and intersessional departures from the approved calendar for 2002

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 56/242, approved the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2002-2003, as submitted by the Committee on Conferences and amended by subsequent decisions taken by the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session. The calendar was issued as document A/AC.172/2002/2.

2. At its 373rd meeting, on 26 August 1994, the Committee had decided that requests for intersessional departures submitted to the Committee should in future be reviewed by the Bureau, in consultation with the Secretariat, for subsequent action.

3. At its 379th meeting, on 23 March 1995, the Committee had agreed that proposed changes to the calendar that did not have programme budget implications could be dealt with by the Secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau of the Committee.

4. At its substantive session of 1995, the Committee had decided that requests for intersessional departures submitted to the Committee that involved a change of venue should be referred to the members for approval. Departures that involved other types of changes, as the Committee had decided at its substantive session of 1994, should be reviewed by the Bureau, in consultation with the Secretariat, for subsequent action.

5. The requests submitted in 2002 for changes of venue or additional sessions or meetings, and the action taken by the Committee are set out below.

02-57921 (E)

Organ	*Request*	*Action taken*
Investments Committee	To meet in Accra on 18 and 19 February 2002 and in conjunction with the meeting of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board in Rome on 9 and 10 July 2002. The Investments Committee usually meets four or five times a year for one day. One of the meetings is held in conjunction with the meetings of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board. The meetings of the Committee are normally held in New York except for the meeting with the Pension Board, which is held wherever the Board convenes, as indicated in A/49/212, paragraph 70. It has been the tradition for a member of the Investments Committee to host one of its meetings. All expenses are always met by the host at no cost to the United Nations and, as confirmed by the Secretary of the Committee, all expenses incurred in connection with the Investments Committee meetings on 18 and 19 February in Accra are covered by the host country in accordance with past practice, as indicated in A/49/212, paragraph 71.	Request approved
Preparatory Committee for the International Conference on Financing for Development	To hold an additional meeting of the Preparatory Committee, subject to the availability of services, on an exceptional basis, in order to adopt the outcome document "Monterrey Consensus" and transmit it to the Conference, and to approve the report of the fourth session of the Preparatory Committee. The meeting was held on 15 February 2002.	Request approved
United Nations Forum on Forests	To convene its second session from 4 to 15 March in New York rather than San Jose, Costa Rica. In its resolution 2001/292, the Economic and Social Council welcomed the offer of the Government of Costa Rica to host this meeting. The Government of Costa Rica, however, informed the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs on 28 January 2002 that, owing to unforeseen circumstances, it was withdrawing its offer to host the Forum. The Bureau of the Forum, at its meeting on 28 January 2002, decided to hold the session at Forum headquarters in New York from 4 to 15 March 2002.	Request approved
Commission on the Status of Women	To hold one additional meeting of the Commission on 25 March 2002 to take action on two more proposals and to finish its work.	Request approved
Fifth Committee	To maintain the four-week duration of its second resumed session, as originally approved in the draft Calendar of Conferences and Meetings, owing to the programme of work of the Committee. Since it was not possible to schedule the four weeks in succession because of the General Assembly special session on children (8-10 May 2002), Conference Services and the Fifth Committee secretariat agreed on the dates of 29 April to 2 May and 13 to 31 May 2002.	Requests approved

Organ	*Request*	*Action taken*
	To hold one additional informal meeting of the Committee on 6 June 2002 and a formal meeting on 17 June 2002 to take action on the draft proposals before it and to conclude its work for the session.	
Group of Governmental Experts on Tracing Small Arms and Light Weapons	To convene its first session in Geneva from 1 to 5 July 2002 rather than in New York from 20 to 24 May 2002. Since some members of the Group would participate in the Open-ended Group of Governmental Experts of States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, scheduled to meet in Geneva from 20 to 24 May 2002, it would be impossible for them also to attend the meeting in New York. Moreover, moving the meeting from New York to Geneva would reduce the cost of holding the meeting owing to the lower cost of travel for some of the experts. Conference Services in Geneva confirmed that it could accommodate the meeting on the dates requested in July.	Request approved
Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters	To convene the thirty-ninth session of the Board from 17 to 19 July 2002 in Geneva rather than in New York in order to give members the opportunity to confer with participants in the Conference on Disarmament. Moreover, since the Board also serves as the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the Geneva venue permits Board members to be in close contact with the staff of the Institute.	Request approved

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II. Calendar of conferences and meetings

B. Adoption of the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2003

Introduction and overview

1. At its 443rd and 444th meetings, on 9 September 2002, the Committee on Conferences reviewed the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2003 (A/57/228/Add.1 and 2).

Discussion

2. The view was expressed that integrated management of the calendar of conferences across duty stations was an area of great potential for streamlining. In preparing the calendar for 2004-2005, the Secretariat could be more proactive in scheduling meetings outside the parallel peak periods and, if necessary, could call upon the Committee for support.

3. It was pointed out that, in addition to meetings financed from the regular budget, the calendar included meetings for which conference services were provided on a reimbursable basis and others for which the programme budget implications had not yet been reviewed by the Fifth Committee and approved by the General Assembly. It would be helpful for the Committee to be able to distinguish those categories when reviewing the calendar.

Conclusions and recommendations

4. **The Committee on Conferences recommended to the General Assembly that it should:**

02-58501 (E)

(a) Adopt the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2003, taking into account the various observations of the Committee and on the understanding that the budgetary implications of certain items, appropriately identified in the draft revised calendar, such as decisions and recommendations of the Economic and Social Council adopted at its 2002 substantive session and included in the calendar, would be reviewed by the responsible legislative bodies;

(b) Authorize the Committee to make any adjustments to the calendar of conferences and meetings for 2003 that might become necessary as a result of actions and decisions taken by the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session.

5. The Committee noted with satisfaction that, in drafting the revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2003, the Secretariat had taken into account the arrangements referred to in General Assembly resolutions 54/248, 55/222 and 56/242 concerning Orthodox Good Friday on 25 April 2003.

6. The Committee requested the Secretariat, when issuing the draft revised calendar for 2003, to identify the source of funding for each item.

7. The Committee invited the Secretary-General, when drafting the biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2004-2005, to submit proposals aimed at further avoiding peak periods at the various duty stations.

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II. Calendar of conferences and meetings

C. Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

1. Meeting statistics of United Nations organs

Introduction and overview

1. At its 443rd meeting, on 9 September 2002, the Committee on Conferences reviewed statistical data contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/57/228) on the planned and actual utilization of conference resources allocated to a core sample of bodies that had met in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2001. The data included compliance and availability indices for assessing compliance with the submission deadlines for pre-session documentation, and availability thereof.

2. In introducing the report, the Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services made several cross-references to the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services" (A/57/289), which addressed documentation-related matters and policies.

Discussion

3. Concern was expressed about the loss of valuable conference resources as a result of late starts, early endings and cancellations of meetings. Unused resources could have been released instead for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States. Members concluded that the underutilization of resources was the result of poor planning, as some committees had a pattern of wasting significant

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amounts of their allotted time year after year, which seemed to suggest that their allocations were too high.

4. Note was taken that the standard three-hour blocks in which interpretation services were provided made it difficult to schedule meetings of shorter duration. It was pointed out that the three-hour blocks facilitated the reallocation of whole unused blocks; however, such reallocation required close cooperation of the bureaux and secretariats of bodies.

Conclusions and recommendations

5. **The Committee on Conferences noted with deep concern that the overall utilization factor at the four duty stations in 2001 had dropped six points below the benchmark of 80 per cent, with a 14 per cent drop in New York, which accounted for the overall decrease. The equivalent of 307 meetings, 921 hours, had not been utilized in 2001, even though the total number of meetings held at those duty stations had been 300 fewer than in 2000.**

6. **The Committee was of the view that the loss of resources was unacceptable. As a first step, meeting planners had examined the reasons for the loss of utilization and the Chairman of the Committee had conducted consultations with the chairpersons of bodies that had been underutilizing their resources for three years in a row. The secretariats and bureaux of those bodies had been urged to consider changes to their programme of work and to introduce discipline into the way they conducted their business. They had also been requested to work more closely with conference services and to adjust their programme of work based on previous patterns for recurring agenda items with a view to reducing waste.**

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II. Calendar of conferences and meetings

C. Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

2. Consultations with/letters to bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them

Introduction and overview

1. At its 443rd meeting, on 9 September 2002, the Committee on Conferences considered an oral report by the Chairman on consultations with bodies concerning the utilization of the conference services available to them.

2. In keeping with section II, paragraph 16, of General Assembly resolution 56/242, the Chairman of the Committee reported that he had sent letters to 11 intergovernmental bodies identified as having consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources during their previous three sessions and had held consultations with their chairpersons and secretaries in an effort to find new and innovative ways of harmonizing the factors of efficiency and the rational use of conference resources.

3. In most cases, the main factor in a low utilization rate was the time lost owing to late starting and/or early ending of meetings. Some chairpersons had expressed dissatisfaction with the methodology of calculating the utilization factor on the grounds that it focused only on the utilization of conference resources while ignoring the ultimate goal of the organs, which was to conduct and finish their business successfully. It was also argued that the methodology was too mechanical for the nature of the mandates of some bodies. However, while the mandates of intergovernmental bodies could not be ignored, the mandate given by the General

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Assembly to the Committee on Conferences was to oversee the utilization of conference services and, in that regard, the methodology for calculating the utilization factor had served a valuable purpose thus far.

4. Some of the ways in which conference services could be used efficiently by the bodies concerned included: improving the accuracy of advanced planning of the number of fully serviced meetings; opening meetings on time, if necessary, even without a quorum, and discussing other items or holding informal consultations if time remained; avoiding cancellations of meetings or cancelling them well in advance; maximizing the option of scheduling informal consultations with interpretation services; and raising awareness among the membership about the underutilization factors, bearing in mind the discontinuation of night and weekend meetings.

Discussion

5. It was pointed out that chairpersons of the Committee on Conferences had been holding consultations with intergovernmental bodies year after year on the utilization of the conference services available to them and that very little had been achieved. Certain chairpersons of bodies seemed to lack the will to cooperate and the arguments they advanced were not convincing. It was time for stricter measures and action, including warning those bodies that their entitlements might be cut.

6. It was suggested that the Committee should identify the main drivers of the shortfall and tailor specific recommendations to those bodies, since heavy users of conference services had a greater impact on the overall utilization rate.

7. Note was taken of the fact, however, that, in a number of cases, the Chairman's consultations with bodies had had a positive impact on the rational and efficient utilization of conference-servicing resources.

Conclusions and recommendations

8. **The Committee on Conferences requested the Chairman to continue to consult on its behalf with the chairpersons of bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources for the past three sessions, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources.**

9. **With regard to changes to the methodology, the Committee considered that the Utilization Factor (UF) was a complex index that incorporated all the aspects of the Meeting Ratio (MR) and the Planning Accuracy Factor (PAF) and included utilization of meeting time as a factor as well. It was therefore clearly superior as an overall measurement of utilization both the MR and the PAF and should thus be kept as the primary index by which utilization performance of intergovernmental bodies was judged.**

10. **The Committee concluded that the explanation given by chairpersons that early endings of meetings could be considered a sign of efficiency was not convincing. It would not be justified to consider a weighted system to account for time lost owing to the early ending of meetings; better planning and flexible adjusting of the programme of work were the best way to reduce time lost in that way.**

11. The Committee welcomed proposals to improve the utilization of those bodies that failed to reach the benchmark figure. The proposals included setting well-defined and achievable objectives for utilization of allocated resources at the organizational meeting of those bodies, such as establishing a higher minimum number of speakers before scheduling a meeting, voting on items in blocks, having back-up agenda items for their daily programme of work, and planning, at the end of a session, the programme of work for the following session.

12. The Committee recommended that, should there be no improvement in the utilization statistics of the most consistent underutilizers, the General Assembly should consider further steps to remedy the situation.